

# Licensed and Unlicensed Child Care

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ is for anyone who is thinking about providing child care or wants to learn more about DCYF licensing requirements. It explains the rules about child care licensing in Washington state. Learn the difference between licensed and unlicensed child care, when a license is required, and who does not need a license.

It also explains why licensing is important, how to apply for a license, and what can happen if child care is provided without one.

For more questions, contact [dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov).

### Q What does licensed child care mean?

A Licensed child care means the child care provider is licensed by DCYF. DCYF licenses family home child cares, child care centers, school-age programs, and outdoor nature-based programs. Child care licenses can cover children from birth to age 13.

### Q What does unlicensed child care mean?

A Unlicensed child care means a person or program is required to have a license from DCYF but does not have one. In other words, they care for children but do not qualify for an exemption from licensing. These rules apply to care for children from birth to age 13.

A list of exemptions can be found in RCW 43.216.010(2) <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.216.010> and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 110-300-0025 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0025>, 110-301-0025 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-301-0025> and 110-302-0025 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-302-0025>.



### Q When is a child care license required?

A A child care license is required when a person or program provides child care on a regular and ongoing basis, and the care takes place outside the child's home. This applies to those who care for children from birth to age 13.

#### A child care license is required when:

- The caregiver is not related to the child.
- A preschool-age child is in care for more than four hours a day.
- A child attends a seasonal camp for more than three months.

School-age children attend a program that is not part of a national group with its own safety rules. See WAC 110-300-0010 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0010>, 110-301-0010 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-301-0010>, and 110-302-0010 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-302-0010>.

### Q Who does not need a child care license from DCYF?

A You do not need a child care license from DCYF if you meet one of the exemptions in RCW 43.216.010(2).

#### Examples of when a license (approval) is not required include:

- Care provided by a family member, family friend, or neighbor.
- Seasonal programs that operate at certain times of the year and for no more than three months in a year.
- Programs that care for preschool-age children for four hours or less per day.
- Parent cooperative programs where parents occasionally care for each other's children, not on a regular schedule.
- Programs that operate on land within a federally recognized Indian reservation and are licensed by the Tribe.
- Programs that operate on a federal military base, unless the military asks that the program follow regular licensing rules.

### Q What does regular and ongoing child care mean?

A Regular and ongoing child care means a person or program provides care to children on a schedule, with no end to the schedule, for less than 24 hours a day. The child care happens when the child's parent or guardian is at work or school.



### Q What does occasional child care mean?

A Occasional child care means that child care is not happening on a regular schedule, with an end date to the schedule.

### Q Why is it important to have a child care license from DCYF?

A Being licensed ensures that child care services being provided meet legal requirements. Following these requirements and state rules helps to make sure children are receiving care that is safe, healthy, and nurturing.

### Q How do I apply for a license?

A To learn about the licensing process, email [dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov). For Outdoor Nature-Based program licenses, email [dcyf.outdoornaturebasedchildcare@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:dcyf.outdoornaturebasedchildcare@dcyf.wa.gov).

### Q How long does it typically take to obtain a license?

A Pre-licensing and licensing time varies for each applicant. The amount of time needed for pre-licensing depends on how much support is required before an official application can be submitted. After an application is submitted, it can take up to 90 days for DCYF to make a decision.

### Q What does it cost to obtain a license?

A Applicants should be prepared for licensing fees, as well as outside costs that DCYF does not capture.

#### DCYF licensing application fees include:

- \$30 for family homes
- \$125 for child care centers, plus \$12 for each slot over 12

### Q What happens if I provide child care without a license?

A If DCYF receives a complaint that a person or program is providing child care without a license (unlicensed child care), DCYF is required to inspect to determine if the information is valid or not.

You can find more information about this in WAC 110-300-0020 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0020>, 110-301-0020 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-301-0020>, 110-302-0020 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-302-0020>, and RCW 43.216.360 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.216.360>.

Within 10 days of receiving the complaint, DCYF will send a notice to the person or program. **The notice will include:**

- Information about when a license is required and why.
- The name of the person or program listed in the complaint.
- A notice to immediately stop providing child care services if a child care license is required.
- Information about how to respond to DCYF, how to apply for a license, information about hearing rights, and how to request a hearing if the person or program does not agree with DCYF's decision.
- Information about civil penalties (or fines) that DCYF can issue when a person or provider is providing unlicensed child care services.

#### Civil penalties may include:

- \$150 per day for a person providing child care services in their home ("Family Home child care").
- \$250 per day for child care centers, school-age programs, or outdoor nature-based programs.
- If the person or program does not start the licensing process within 30 days of this notice, DCYF will post information on its public website stating that the person or program is operating an unlicensed child care program.

If the complaint is found to be valid, the person or program has 30 days to submit in writing an agreement that they will stop providing care or will work toward getting a license.

Valid findings are posted on Child Care Check ([www.findchildcarewa.org](http://www.findchildcarewa.org)) after 30 days.

### Q What happens if I continue to provide child care without a license?

A If a person or program continues to provide unlicensed child care, that person or program will be guilty of a misdemeanor (per RCW 43.216.365 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.216.365>) and may have a court order issued against them (per RCW 43.216.355 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.216.355>).